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FOR PRESIDENT BUSH FROM AMBASSADOR VICTOR H. ASHE

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [OVIP](#) [PL](#)  
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR YOUR MEETING MARCH 10 WITH POLISH  
PM DONALD TUSK

REF: WARSAW 109

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Classified By: Ambassador Victor Ashe for reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Mr. President, your meeting on March 10 with Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk will underscore Poland's importance as a key ally of the United States, one which has stood shoulder to shoulder with us in Iraq, is stepping up its commitments in Afghanistan, and is the potential host for missile interceptor sites as part of our Missile Defense program. Poland is also a leader in the EU in promoting freedom in Ukraine, Georgia, Belarus and Cuba. Tusk is enjoying widespread popularity, having just completed his first 100 days in office. Most Poles credit Tusk and his party, Civic Platform (PO), for steadier and more sensible leadership after two years of roiling conflict under the leadership of identical twins, President Lech Kaczynski and former PM Jaroslaw Kaczynski. Tusk ignored those within his party who urged him to mount a more spirited opposition to the Kaczynski government, preferring to hang back and let the Kaczynskis and their fractious coalition partners implode. PO won as a result of a huge turnout of anti-Kaczynski voters in snap elections held in October 2007. Having routed Jaroslaw, Tusk has, at best, a tense cohabitation with his twin, President Kaczynski. Many expect Tusk to run against Kaczynski in the 2010 Presidential elections, a rematch of their 2005 race.

¶2. (C) Tusk is 50 years old, quiet and somewhat reserved. He does not have the charisma of other Polish political leaders, like former Presidents Lech Walesa or Aleksander Kwasniewski, but he is an adroit politician, who repeatedly proves to outmaneuver political opponents. As one of the founders of his political party, he outflanked his colleagues to emerge as PO's unrivaled leader. He is an avid soccer player. Earlier in his career he served as Minister of Sports, and many joked that he was more interested in playing soccer himself rather than running his ministry. He is married and has two college aged children. He comes from Gdansk, on the Baltic coast, near the Presidential compound where you met President Kaczynski last June. Tusk does not miss any opportunity to say how much he prefers Gdansk to Warsaw. He is not as stiff and formal as his predecessor, but can be aloof and somewhat reserved, particularly at first. He does not speak English, and had virtually no experience in foreign relations before assuming his office.

¶3. (C) Tusk and PO, like their predecessors and most Poles, value the U.S. as Poland's key partner. But he won last

October's elections in part with his promise to restore Poland's image in Europe, which was badly frayed by the strident and nationalistic message trumpeted by the Kaczynskis. Tusk and his team have proved more adroit at working with their EU partners, playing a more cooperative role on the Lisbon Treaty, for instance, than their predecessors. We should expect Poland to continue to focus on this repair work, which in my view is a positive thing in the long run for Polish-American relations. We want Poland to punch at its fighting weight within EU institutions, even if it means that we cannot expect them to automatically accept our views on some subjects. Poland's restored stature within the EU makes it better able to advance our priority shared goals, including promoting freedom and democracy in Belarus and Cuba, and giving Ukraine and Georgia hope for eventual integration into European institutions.

14. (C) Tusk is also winning political points for restoring greater normalcy in Poland's relationship with Russia, after a concerted chill over the past few years that started with former President Kwasniewski's leading role in Ukraine's Orange Revolution (which won him Russia's enmity) and continued with the Kaczynskis' raw anti-Russian outlook. Tusk's efforts, starting with a removal of Poland's objections to Russia's entry into the OECD and continuing with his February visit to Moscow, have paid off with the lifting of trade embargoes on Polish meat and agricultural products. But Tusk, like most Poles, is essentially distrustful of Moscow's intentions, and he has remained firm on Poland's bottom lines. He will not lift Poland's veto of the EU negotiating mandate with Russia until energy security is addressed, has insisted Poland will decide on MD on its own merits, and has continued Poland's close ties to Georgia and support for democracy in Belarus. Most Poles support his approach and agree that Poland and Russia do better by talking to one another.

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15. (C) Missile Defense is at the top of our bilateral agenda, and negotiations continue as we prepare for Tusk's visit. Tusk has stated openly that he is skeptical about the need for MD interceptor sites in Poland, which reflects the broad political view here in Poland. Part of this is Tusk's political calculation that he must be seen to drive a hard bargain with the United States in order to sell MD to a skeptical public; part of it plays to his political instinct to hang back, rather than lead on tough issues. But there is also a real fear among many Poles that the site will increase the security threat from Russia, a fear Putin has happily fueled. The Poles have told us plainly for months that they will need USG assistance in modernizing their air defenses in order to move forward. Secretary Rice personally pledged to FM Radek Sikorski that we would move forward on this track, as well as on MD basing negotiations, but you should know that the Poles view real and simultaneous progress of both defense modernization and MD as necessary. Assistant Secretary Steve Mull led a successful first round of

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modernization talks February 29 here in Warsaw, which has moved us forward enough to satisfy FM Sikorski. Under Secretary John Rood will now lead another round of MD talks

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on March 6-7, just prior to Tusk's visit. I have sought to disabuse the Poles of the notion that they can wait out your Administration in order to cut a more advantageous deal with your successor, a notion which some senior Polish officials have floated.

16. (C) The new government's harder negotiating stance on MD wins points from many Poles, who question what many saw as the Kaczynskis' overly reflexive pro-American stance. Nevertheless, failure to reach a deal on MD will have a real political cost for Tusk. Even his willingness to "consult"

with Russia on MD plans when he met with Putin in Moscow on February 8 turned into a political hot potato. Tusk understands fully that the spirited opposition here is poised to charge that failure to negotiate an MD agreement represents Tusk caving in to Moscow. FM Sikorski is also under enormous political pressure to deliver an agreement that is more advantageous to Poland. The Czech decision to give a green light on their radar portion of the MD proposal will only add to the pressure for the Poles not to derail the deal.

¶7. (C) With respect to Iraq, Tusk pledged during the campaign to withdraw Polish combat troops in 2008. We have pressed the Poles to stay through October 2008 and to remain active at their current troop strength until October 1, for which you should thank Tusk explicitly. Your expression of appreciation for Poland's sacrifices and reassurance that we respect their deadline will help to make the transition to Provincial Iraqi Control smoother. On Afghanistan, Poland remains one of the few NATO countries which contributes troops without caveats. We are in discussions with them on their request to consolidate troops in Paktika province. You may wish to acknowledge Poland's additional troop contribution (400) and express condolences for the two Polish soldiers killed by a land mine in late February. There is not widespread public support for the deployment, and Tusk should be thanked for his firm commitment to this NATO mission.

¶8. (C) The Polish economy continues to boom, with estimated GDP growth of 6.5% last year. U.S. companies consider Poland a good place to do business. PM Tusk's government has been slow to introduce needed reforms but plans to privatize some state-owned assets and introduce laws that will reduce bureaucracy and red tape. Energy security remains a critical issue for the government, which continues to be concerned about its energy dependence on Russia. PM Tusk's discussion with President Putin failed to reinvigorate a Polish proposal to build a gas pipeline from the Baltics across Polish territory rather than the NordStream pipeline across the Baltic Sea. Nevertheless, most Poles believe that U.S. leadership on energy security has led to a broader dialogue within the EU and NATO and hope we will continue our efforts to work with Poland and the EU to manage Russia's growing dominance.

¶9. (C) Recently, the Polish Oil and Gas Company, PGNiG, an essentially state-owned enterprise, announced that it signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Iranian Offshore Oil Company to do exploration and development work in Iran. We've alerted Polish government officials to the agreement and explained our concerns about Iran's intentions. Government officials share our concern about the Iranian threat. Unfortunately, the company sees Iranian energy as a

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means to diversify away from Russia. We believe political pressure will be necessary to convince the company that the investment should not happen and we'll continue to discuss our concerns with the government.

¶10. (C) You may wish to mention that you will send a delegation to the 65th Anniversary commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, when 50,000 Jews battled their Nazi captors. This anniversary is significant because there are only a handful of survivors, most of whom live in Israel. The commemoration will take place on April 15, and Israeli President Shimon Peres (who was born Szymon Perski, in Wiszniew, Poland) will attend. You may also wish to acknowledge the GOP's efforts to pass a restitution law covering personal property seized by the Nazis and Communists. Of all of the Central and Eastern European emergent democracies, Poland alone has failed to address this issue. It is admittedly vastly more complex here owing both to the size of the pre-war Jewish population in Poland and the level of destruction at the end of the war. Several

previous governments have sought to pass legislation; none have succeeded. It would be very helpful to raise the issue and acknowledge how we continue to view this legislation as important.

¶11. (SBU) We hope to initial changes to the U.S.-Polish Fulbright scholarship program, which next year will celebrate its 50th anniversary. It has been an enormous success story. We also expect to announce that soon after the visit we will sign a totalization agreement between the Polish Government and the Social Security Administration which will facilitate payments to Poles and Americans who have worked and contributed to retirement systems in both countries. It also means that Polish citizens (largely widows) will be able to draw on survivor benefits to which they would otherwise be excluded.

¶12. (SBU) Finally, Tusk will almost certainly raise the issue of visas. His government has somewhat downplayed the issue, but the subject was back in the news this week as Canada announced that it was dropping its visa requirement for Polish citizens. In my conversations with Poles I have indicated your support for Poland's eventual admission to the Visa Waiver Program, and your call for Congress to change the legislation in such a way as to make that possible, but Congress has not enacted your proposal in its entirety.

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